

# REFLECTIONS for LENT 2024



Written by  
the Border Conference  
of the Central States  
Synod of the ELCA.

the **POINT** of all of this... These devotions mean something to us because they are *ours*. They are written by Lutherans here in Missouri and Kansas with different experiences, perspectives, and talents. By sharing these stories, we are inviting one another to know God as we do. We hope that these stories help you see God more clearly active in your own life.

how to use this

**DEVOTIONAL**... Plan a time each day that works for you. It might be when you wake up or go to bed, before a meal, waiting in the car for kids, or with a loved one. Set an alarm to remind you if it helps. If you miss a few days, pick up with today's reflection. You can mark what you miss to go back later.

We encourage you to read the full scripture passage listed at the top of each page to hear the context of God's Word, but it's not a requirement.

Finish by with the prayer. Feel free to add anything God has moved you to say, anything else on your heart, or additional prayers you've learned.

get this on your  
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## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

**“Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
and relents from punishing.” - Joel 2:13b**

A number of years ago we vacationed in Yellowstone National Park, where devastating forest fires had ravaged thousands of acres of the Park just months before. As we traveled through these barren parts of Yellowstone, once filled with endless trees, we were reminded of the destructive power of wildfires. The dark gray ash was a sign of all that had seemingly been destroyed. And then, as we drew closer, we could see new growth appearing and new plants emerging. Tenacious green sprouts were rising out of the ashes!

Ash Wednesday reminds us that out of the ashes of our sin, our failures, our losses, and our frailty, God will bring new life and new hope. Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent will provide fertile ground for reflection, repentance, renewal, and regeneration of our lives through the power of our gracious and merciful God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And there is no better teacher for that than Creation itself. As we hear the words once again, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” we are reminded of our mortality and our origin as creatures formed by God from the very soil of the Earth. As poet Nikita Gill reminds us in 93 percent Stardust, “We have calcium in our bones, iron in our veins, carbon in our souls, and nitrogen in our brains.” We are intimately part of Creation, interconnected with all that God has made. Creation longs to grow and flourish, utilizing the nutrients of decay and death to foster new life. It’s all a part of natural cycles that acknowledge death as a path to life.

1. What needs to die in you for new life to grow and flourish?
2. How can seeing ourselves as a part of Creation (not apart from it) shape how we nurture life for all that God has made – people, animals, habitats, air, water, soil?

**Gracious and merciful God, as we begin this journey of Lent,  
fill our hearts with openness to your steadfast love for us  
and all of Creation. Help us to nurture life in all our thoughts,  
words, and deeds. Transform our failings and losses into  
new life and hope. Amen.**

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6-8

**“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...”**  
- Isaiah 58:6-8

Does anyone fast anymore during Lent? How many people actually “give up” something for Lent as a form of fasting? We continue to lift up fasting as one of the disciplines of Lent, but should we? Has it lost its relevance?

What is the point of fasting? “Resisting temptation” develops spiritual strength. Fasting is a way to deny oneself and declare that all comes from God. Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal our true spiritual condition, what is really important to us. Do any of those reasons resonate?

The prophet Isaiah invites us to think about fasting, not in terms of what it does for us and spiritual strength, but as an opportunity to turn outward, away from ourselves, to care for our neighbor. Instead of giving up something, fasting invites us to add more intentional acts of justice and love. And perhaps, when our focus is on the neighbor, on justice for others, then we do find that we are strengthened spiritually, that we are able to more clearly declare that all comes from God, is of God, and therefore caring for neighbors is putting God first.

Imagine if we took seriously the fasting that God choose. Imagine the light that would break into the darkness, the healing that would be experienced, the glory of the Lord that would shine through the church into the world. That is my prayer and hope for the church this Lenten season.

1. Has fasting lost its relevance?
2. How will you turn outward to take seriously the fasting God chooses?

**God of justice, God mercy, help us to fast from those words and actions that harm others and ourselves so that we might be beacons of hope and compassion for the world. Through the one who fasted for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Bishop Susan Canda, Central States Synod

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Scripture Reading: Psalm 25

**“All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.” - Psalm 25:10**

I am not a patient person; I am not good at waiting. And I believe that the Lord is trustworthy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. I think I know God's ways. This passage is a good reminder to me that I am a sinner, that only God is upright. He leads me, guides me, and teaches me. The paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. This passage calls me to be open to God's will. Less about my will. Recently I started meeting with a life coach. She reminded me to be fully present, to breathe, to pray, to meditate, and to experience life rather than trying to drive it. Such wise words. It reminds me of my own pastor's sermons when he would remind us to really let Jesus take the wheel to our lives when we offer it and quit being a backseat driver. Will I be able to enjoy the ride with Jesus at the wheel? Can I keep my mouth shut? Teach me your paths, God, so that I might have my eyes open to the steadfast love and mercy all around me.

1. Do you let Jesus drive or are you telling him how?
2. How do you lift up your soul and wait on the Lord?
3. How would you describe God's steadfast love and mercy in tangible ways in your own life?

**Dear God, thank you for leading and guiding me in your path of steadfast love and mercy. Thank you for teaching me that the lowly will be lifted up. Thank you for remembering me according to your love and forgetting the sins I commit. Continue to lead and guide me in your paths. Help me to be patient and trusting. Surely goodness, mercy, and steadfast love will surround me my whole life through. Amen.**

Pastor Jennifer Thomas, ELCA Foundation  
Salem Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Scripture Reading: Psalm 32

**“Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.” - Ps. 32:9**

When I was growing up on a small farm in Pottawatomie county, Kansas, I had a pony named Teddy. I liked to say that Teddy was my bicycle. He was half Shetland and half Quarter horse, so he wasn't very big. I rode Teddy to bring in the cows for milking. I rode him to visit friends on neighboring farms, and even, on occasion, I rode Teddy to the one room country school that I attended. I loved that old horse, but, he had a stubborn streak that rivaled that of the proverbial mule. He and I got along famously, but if a stranger tried to ride him, he was more than likely to turn a deaf ear to the command to “giddyup,” and ignore the drumming of heels against his ribs to get him to go, and just stand there stoically, bearing a strong resemblance to Lot's wife after she was turned into a pillar of salt. In the company of other horses, if given the chance, he would bite or kick, depending on which end of Teddy the intruder happened to be closest to. He was a loveable but “ornery” old horse.

Verse 9 counsels us, “Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.” I could sum up this verse by saying, “Do not be like Teddy!” When I look around, I find a lot of people who resemble old Teddy. When I look in the mirror, I see a person who bears a strong resemblance to that horse. We obstinately refuse to follow the lead and guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ. We refuse to go where God is calling us and, like Teddy, lash out at strangers, and people who we consider a threat to us, our possessions, our way of life.

In Ephesians 6 Paul uses the imagery of armor to describe the virtues that Christians should aspire to. He counsels Christians to “fasten the belt of truth,” and “put on the breastplate of righteousness,” and “take the shield of faith, etc.” In a similar way, I was going to call upon my Christian siblings to put on the bridle of God, with the bit being the words and deeds of Jesus, the reins being the old and new testaments and the rest of the bridle being the sacred traditions of the church. But, then, I looked again at the text and it says, “do not be like a horse or mule”. The Psalmist isn't calling on us to respond to God's bit and Bridle, but to gain **“understanding”** so that we don't need a bit or bridle. The Psalmist desires that we understand the will of God for us and for our lives, and therefore, we readily, willingly, joyfully, free of coercion, repent of our mulish ways and give ourselves over to loving God and loving our neighbors in accordance with the will of God.

1. In what ways are you like my childhood bicycle, “Teddy”?

**Good and gracious God, by means of your living Word, Jesus the Christ, give us a deep understanding of your great love, mercy and justice, and by your spirit, inspire us to conform our lives to your will. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Gary Teske, Our Saviors Lutheran Church, Topeka, KS

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:9-15

**“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’” - Mark 1:14-15**

Jesus came into the world on a mission from God. He had a message to share as he invited people to share in God’s mission. As he began his earthly ministry, he proclaimed “the good news of God” and this was the message he shared with others, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

In essence, the message Jesus proclaimed was a statement of what God has done and a call to action. The statement, *“the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near”*; announces two things: 1) Now is the right time! and 2) God has entered our world and now things will be different. It is no longer “business as usual.”

The call to action also has two parts: 1) *“Repent”* is an invitation from God to us to have a “re-orientation in our thinking and in our behavior.” Because the time is now and the kingdom of God has come near; it is appropriate for those who hear this message to have a change of heart; and 2) “believe in the good news”. This is an invitation for us to believe in God and to align our actions with our beliefs.

1. How does God’s mission impact your life?
2. As a follower of Jesus, what message do you share with others?
3. If you heeded God’s call to *“repent and believe in the good news,”* what would you do differently?

**Gracious God, thank you for the invitation to participate in your mission. Help me to repent and to believe in the good news.  
Amen.**

Retired Pastor Bob Dealey, First Lutheran Church, Topeka, KS

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Scripture Reading: Psalm 104:14-17

**“The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.” - Psalm 104:16**

I was having trouble not tensing my neck when I did my triceps extensions, my kettle bell deadlifts, my bicep curls. I try hard when I work out at 66, with two grandbabies to help care for, and a long life I'd like to live. I tense my neck when I write grants, when I have coffee with a friend, or when I do ball bugs. I wonder if anyone else has this problem. I have learned one thing from my work-out coach—if I brace my core and lower my shoulder blades, my neck can relax, and I stand straight. One day while working out, I thought of my trunk, that glorious support for my body and life, that balance beam essential for riding horses. I imagined my trunk as the trunk of a tree.

For me, nature provides proof of God, and I find parallels within myself by what I see in nature. Suddenly that day, I saw my trunk as containing my values, hard and painfully won character, my accomplishments made possible by knowing that God provides every idea I need. I recognized my core, perhaps for the first time, as strength and goodness.

I needed that image, because I have done several things which I find difficult to let go and to completely forgive—two divorces, having hurt friends and loved ones during a self-centered young adulthood. The lessons I have learned, the proof of God when I relinquished all control, and the humility I achieved, I suddenly viewed as my strong core. I could be proud of this core. My limbs and my neck, like a tree's, may be tossed about by the world. On good days, my limbs gather what God's world brings me. They produce the fruits of my work.

When I feel my neck and shoulders begin to tense, I remember that tree and think of my strong core. I lower my shoulder blades, hold my trunk firm, and stand tall. I free my neck and limbs to relax into the movement of God's world.

1. Do you feel tense when you concentrate or try hard?
2. What in nature reminds you of freedom?

**Dear God, help me see every recovering plant in spring,  
every medical breakthrough when researchers begin to understand  
your world a little better, every act of kindness as a reflection of you  
that also can be found within me. Amen.**

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-18a

**“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing.” - 1 Peter 3:8-9**

In an article in Newsweek in August of 2023, Russell Moore, (former leader in the Southern Baptist Convention and now editor at Christianity Today) said in an interview:

“Multiple pastors tell me, essentially, the same story about quoting the Sermon on the Mount, parenthetically, in their preaching—'turn the other cheek'—[and] to have someone come up after to say, 'Where did you get those liberal talking points?' When the pastor would say, 'I'm literally quoting Jesus Christ' ... The response would be, 'Yes, but that doesn't work anymore. That's weak,' When we get to the point where the teachings of Jesus himself are seen as subversive to us, then we're in a crisis.”

Maybe.

Or maybe we beginning to understand how the teachings of Jesus hit his world and should operate in ours.

“Jesus was not crucified for being a nice guy.” New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan is fond of reminding us.

Jesus was a subversive. His teachings were a threat to the Roman order and the way thing in that society operated. The vision Jesus casts is one of the meek inheriting the earth, the poor receiving “good things” and a persistent call to self-sacrifice for the sake of the other.

None of that is ever going to be very popular IF you are the one currently in power or enjoying the “good things” right now.

1. How do Jesus' hard teachings hit me? As demand or promise?
2. How can I be about the work of encouraging “unity of spirit” in these most contentious of times?

**Gracious God, may Peter's prayer above stir my heart and seep into my bones. May I become the instrument of unity, and blessing I am intended to be. Amen.**

Pastor Merle Brockhoff, Transitional Pastor, Kansas City, MO



## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77

**“I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me....  
Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?”  
- Psalm 77:1,13**

Is there a song that always seems to bring back a memory?  
Are they pleasant memories or painful memories?

For me, I have several songs that evoke memories on so many different levels. When I am feeling a little of sorts, I like to listen to “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Simon and Garfunkel. If the day is going well, I enjoy listening to John Denver’s “Sunshine on My Shoulders” If I am trying to be contemplative, I like to listen to various hymn selections but especially, “When I Survey The Wonderous Cross.” I love to sing or recite verse three “See, from his head, his hands, he feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e’re such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

I am reminded that even in good times or troubled times the Lord’s presence is always there. There are so many daily reminders that we encounter that can cause us to drift away and ignore God’s outstretched hand.

When we remember all that God has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that God is holy and is greater than all the other gods that we let into our hearts and minds.

As we continue our Lenten journey, we should remember and reflect on our cries of help to God, knowing that God is, has been and always will be there for us.

1. Is there a song that always seems to bring back a memory?  
Are they pleasant memories or painful memories?
2. What cries have you offered to God in the past 6 months?  
How has God responded to your cries?

**God of mercy, remember us when we cry to you,  
hear us, and give us your peace. Amen.**

Pastor Edd Wunderlich, Gloria Dei, Kansas City, MO

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:31-38

**“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake... will save it.” - Mark 8:35**

When it comes to bowling, ping pong, or most other sports, I'm one of those people who tends to start strong and finish weak. It's not because I get tired. It's because as time passes, I try too hard.

Truthfully, I hate to lose and I like to impress. Even though I often start strong, it never seems to be good enough. So I try harder. And do worse. Maybe I get more tense and focus more on doing well, rather than just letting my body follow the rhythm that I've developed. Whatever it is, it makes me do worse, which makes me frustrated, so I try even harder, and do even worse. And it's not very fun anymore.

This isn't just a problem I face with sports. When doing art, I keep reworking things, making things worse. When it comes to relationships, I try so hard to relate or impress that it becomes awkward for everyone.

Whatever it is, it seems the harder I try, the worse I do. I'm not advising that we should not try to do our best. But sometimes trying too hard causes us to lose sight of why we are doing it, and to let go of the natural gifts God has given us. We stop being ourselves and try to be God instead.

I suspect it's the same problem Adam and Eve had. They had everything. But they stopped trusting the gifts God had given them, and tried to take control. They wanted to be the best people to ever have lived! And they started feeling inadequate. They became ashamed because they wanted to impress God. And life stopped being any fun.

Sometimes I forget about myself and I do manage to have fun. It's usually when I'm playing with kids. It helps me to find non-competitive things to do together with others. But sometimes, even then, I try to make the perfect Lego tower (of Babel?), and I miss out on actually playing with my kid.

Jesus is right. Sometimes we just need to lose ourselves. We need to stop trying to win, impress, be perfect, and be like God. We need to enjoy playing and being with those we love. I'm not all that great at it, but I hope and pray you manage to lose yourself at least once in a while.

1. In what activities do you find yourself getting lost (in a good way)?
2. When can you just be you, instead of trying to be perfect?

**For God's sake, give me the courage to let go  
and just play sometimes. Amen.**

Pastor Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Scripture Reading: Psalm 22

**“Posterity will serve YHWH;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,  
and proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.” - Psalm 22:30-31**

This psalm evokes “I will pay my vows to the Lord, for all his benefits to me, I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving...” from our sung liturgy as a child. Participating in the worship services each week immerses our lives in the word of God, the prayers of intercession, the Lord’s Prayer, songs of lament, worship and praise, and the community of fellow believers. The benefits I receive are that I remember that God has saved us through Jesus Christ which encourages and sustains my hope, not just for me, but so that I might encourage and share that hope with others.

1. Who from a previous generation has shared the good news with you?
2. What might you say that God has done for you?
3. Can you name one person that you might encourage today?

**Dear God, thank you for your deliverance and salvation.  
Thank you for the ancestors in the faith who have shared  
the good news with others so that we might hear and believe  
today. Thank you for filling me with the Holy Spirit that I might  
also share the good news with others today. Bless this generation  
with courage so that future generations may know  
the goodness of our God. Amen.**

Pastor Jennifer Thomas, ELCA Foundation  
Salem Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Scripture Reading: Mark 8: 27-30

**“Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am?’” - Mark 8:27**

*Who Am I?* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*Who am I? They often tell me, I would step from my cell's confinement calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a country squire from his country house.*

*Who am I? They often tell me, I would talk to my warders freely and friendly and clearly, as though it were mine to command.*

*Who am I? They also tell me, I would bear the days of misfortune, equably, smilingly, proudly, like one accustomed to win.*

*Am I then really all that which other men tell of?*

*Or am I only what I know of myself, restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat, yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds, thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness, trembling with anger at despoticisms and petty humiliation, tossing in expectation of great events, powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance, weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making; faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?*

*Who am I? This or the other?*

*Am I one person today, and tomorrow another? Am I both at once?*

*A hypocrite before others, and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?*

*Or is something within me still like a beaten army, fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?*

*Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.*

*Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.*

Lent is a time for asking questions. Jesus asks the key question. “Who do people say that I am,” and in answering that question we discover who we are. That is the Lenten journey.

1. How often to you ask yourself the identity question?
2. How is your identity connected to the identity of Jesus?

**Dear God, given me the courage to ask who am I, and the patience to listen to your answer. Help me see in you who I am. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Michael Brecke, First Lutheran Church, Mission Hills, KS

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Scripture Reading: Romans 4:13-25

**“It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” - Romans 4:13**

We have all dealt with propositions in our lives based on “if you do this, I will do that.” We are used to this and can rationalize the fairness – quid pro quo, tit for tat. I did not realize until I started this essay that this was never the way God presented his Promises to us, starting with Abraham.

The promise was unconditional based on Genesis 17 starting with verse 1. God’s words: “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless...This is my covenant with you.”

God was presenting a gift – a covenant – with no strings attached other than belief and faith. The law came later, and we have spent hours, years, eons trying to interpret it to our needs, often setting up unreachable standards or varying understandings of “the rules”.

Is the answer perhaps much simpler than all of this? Just faith? With the best level of faith our human constitution can pull together, flawed and inconsistent though it always seems to be, adherence to the core tenets of the law become clearer, simpler, and not lost as we try to determine whose interpretation is better.

So perhaps we focus on faith, say our prayers, and the other parts fall into place.

1. Can we ever be certain that the interpretation of the “laws of God” we are facing and true to their original intent?
2. Can letting faith by our guide give us all the knowledge we need to deal with the laws?

**Dear God, please strengthen the gift of faith  
you have given us so that we learn to rely on it at all times,  
no matter what we are facing. Amen.**

Donna Mason, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Scripture Reading: Genesis 21:1-7

**“God has brought laughter for me;  
everyone who hears will laugh with me.” - Genesis 21:6**

Have you ever laughed in church before? I am sure most of us have at one point . . . usually because of a corny joke the Pastor said. Or, perhaps a crying child. I remember as a seminary intern I was delivering a very challenging sermon to my congregation. One of my first times to use a prophetic voice. The mood was tense and right in the middle of my delivery a baby started crying. I responded with, “See, this topic is so controversial it even makes babies cry.” The whole room began to laugh and the tension was eased. Then I was able to finish my sermon and we had meaningful dialogue about it.

Laughter is one of God’s greatest gifts. It eases tension. It brings joy. It helps us build relationships with one another over shared experiences. Laughter helps us knock down walls of division. It also helps us experience the presence of God. I love how Sarah and Abraham chose the name “Isaac” for their long-awaited firstborn son. Perhaps you have heard this before, but “Isaac” in Hebrew is derived from the verb “to laugh.” Sarah is so overcome with joy, and bewilderment that she gave birth at her age, that she cannot help but laugh. I imagine Abraham shared a chuckle or two as well. The promise that God made to Sarah and Abraham that they would conceive a child finally came true. The time is fulfilled, as Jesus might say. So, it is no coincidence that Genesis says Abraham was “a hundred years old” when Isaac was born (21:5). 100 is the Biblical number for completion. God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah is now complete. And by naming their child Isaac they will remember their joy and laughter for the rest of their lives.

1. What promises has God fulfilled in your life?
2. In what times of joy and laughter have you experienced God’s presence?
3. Who are the “Isaacs” in your life?

The next time you find yourself chuckling, I invite you to remember Sarah and Abraham and reflect on God as the ultimate source of joy and fulfillment.

**Gracious God, thank you for the gift of joy and laughter.  
Help us to see your goodness in everyday and share joy  
and laughter with others. Amen.**

Pastor Zac Sturm, Atonement Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

**“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,  
the conviction of things not seen.” - Hebrews 11:1**

Think of all the people you have encountered in the church. Hundreds? Thousands? Members in the pew, lay leaders, teachers, youth directors, pastors . . . etc., etc. I was blessed to grow up at one church, being a member of MacArthur Park Lutheran Church in San Antonio, Texas, the first 22 years of my life. I am blessed to have served as a pastor in the Central States Synod for almost 18 years. I have officiated over many funerals, baptisms, weddings, church meetings, youth trips . . . the list of people I have encountered goes on and on. I have been blessed by so many people. Do I remember many names? Yes. Do I remember all the names? No, not everyone's name.

But I will always remember Mrs. Lewis. Mrs. Lewis was my Sunday school teacher when I was in third grade. She taught us in the upstairs of the education wing. About ten of us third graders sat around a big rectangular table and we studied Hebrews together. Mrs. Lewis was kind, gentle, and patient. She was not overly demanding, though she did make us memorize one verse of Hebrews. It was the first Bible verse I ever memorized. I still say it quite often: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). As followers of Jesus, we do not always see where the path is leading. In fact, we cannot. But we are called to trust in the one who leads us—Christ Jesus our Lord.

Years later, Mrs. Lewis was able to attend my ordination as a pastor in 2006. She died shortly after, but I like to believe from her heavenly home she has seen the fruits of what she began. I routinely recite the lectionary gospel on Sunday. And I have performed from memory large portions of scripture, including the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Mark. And it all began with one verse-- Hebrews 11:1, in Mrs. Lewis' third grade Sunday school class. You never know the difference you make. Thank you, Mrs. Lewis.

1. What Bible verses have you memorized?  
What led you to commit them to memory?
2. Who has planted seeds your faith journey?  
In whom is God calling you to plant seeds?

**Gracious God, encourage us to use our gifts and plant seeds  
in the lives of others. And by our Spirit help us to trust  
in you and your purpose that we cannot always see. Amen.**

Pastor Zac Sturm, Atonement Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Scripture Reading: Psalm 105:1-11

**“Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles,  
and the judgements he pronounced.” - Psalm 105:5**

“*Remember* you are dust and to dust you shall return...”

“Do this in *remembrance* of me...”

As followers of Jesus, we are called upon to do a lot of *remembering*. Each Sunday we are to remember our baptism. To make the sign of the cross and remember that we are marked with the cross of Christ.

Throughout all of history, God’s children have been encouraged to remember all the mighty acts that God does for us. From the beginning of creation, to the coming of Christ we are to daily remember all that God has done. Whether we are on the mountain top or in the valley, God remembers us and calls us by name. One thing that we can do this Lenten season to trace God’s hands in the history of our faith journey. God’s promises are forever. Look back on your history and see the places where God has lifted you up and carried you.

*Remember* today and every day...

The Lord says:

“He who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel,  
fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name;  
you are mine” - Isaiah 43:1

1. What period of history interests you the most?
2. What about that time attracts you?

**Holy God, let us remember all that you have given  
and done for us on this day and all the days to come. Amen**

Pastor Edd Wunderlich, Gloria Dei, Kansas City, MO



## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Scripture Reading: Exodus 19: 1-9a

**“Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine.” Exodus. 19:5**

Have you ever accepted an offer you could not refuse? And did you believe the person who made the offer? This passage from Exodus is the moment when God invites Israel into the covenantal relationship that sets them apart from all other people. There is so much at stake here. God reminds the people that they are in the presence of divine power. Moses receives strong backing from God so that the people trust that when Moses speaks, his words are coming from God. And the people, well, they are gung-ho about it. Maybe because they don't quite know what they are getting themselves into; and well, they've been wandering in the desert for several weeks eating the same food and wondering where this is all going. Darn right there better be something good at the end of all this!

Talk about a real carrot and stick moment for God. “If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all peoples.” Who wouldn't want God's favor?

Israel soon learns, as we all do, that when we enter a covenant, something will be required of us. God's faithfulness assures us that the divine part of the covenant made with us will be upheld. We on the other hand are the bigger risk, and yet, God chooses to be in relationship with us.

When have you accepted responsibility for something, and later learned how hard it would be to fulfill your obligations?

1. Have you ever made a promise to God?
2. How well do you keep it?

**Holy One, help me obey your voice. When I cannot hear it, remind me of your faithfulness and love. Guide me back into right relationship with you so that I may love and serve others in your holy name. AMEN.**

Rev. Sue Tarkka, Overland Park Lutheran Church, Overland Park, KS

## FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

**“Let the words of my mouth  
and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you, O Lord,  
my rock and my redeemer.”  
- Psalm 19:14**

As a child, I loved hearing the creation story from the children’s bible in my mom’s voice. I can imagine her voice reciting this psalm. The creation stories and the psalms share the who of our beginnings, our lives, and our endings. I’m fortunate to still have both parents living, and I give thanks for them every day, and yet I know that as we all age, that one day, they will be gone. One day, I will be gone, but until then, I hope that during this life, I may be faithful to God’s steadfast love and mercy in my own life – in thought, word, and deed. And I’m confident, when I fail, when I sin, when I fall short, that the God who created the universe will revive me with forgiveness and salvation. For YHWH is my rock and my redeemer.

1. Whose voice do you hear as you read this scripture passage silently?
2. What does it mean to you that God is your rock?
3. How does God’s law revive your soul?

**Dear God, with praise and thanksgiving I come before you this day, confident that your law sets me on right pathways. I am grateful for the voices who read scripture to me. I am grateful for the psalmist’s meditation and writing. And I am grateful for the translators who make it accessible to us. Help me to be kind in my thoughts and words. May your Word be sweet as honey in our mouths and in our hearts. Amen.**

Pastor Jennifer Thomas, ELCA Foundation  
Salem Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## SATURDAY, MARCH 2

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:2-8

**“Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved listen to him!’” - Mark 9:7**

A few years ago, in response to the outcry of, “No one listens to me,” I started a ministry in the River Market area of Kansas City, Missouri called “The Listening Post. There was no building, no street front office, no location, nothing just me and the streets, the homeless villages, the people who worked in bars and restaurants, no clerical collar, just me.

This story happened on one cold February day, the temperature was below zero . . . We came to an overpass at I-35 and Wyandotte and saw a man standing, in the brutal cold. He had one of those crudely drawn signs, asking for help. We were in the far-right lane of traffic. I was in the left-hand backseat, the closest one to the man. I volunteered to go. I took with me a food bag, some new winter gloves and a couple of sweaters and some warm socks. I skipped and danced my way through the lanes of traffic. Approaching the man, I asked if he would he like some food. He took the offered food bag. I held out the gloves and clothing for him to look at and choose. The man wore several layers of clothing, his hair was long and unkempt. When I got close to him, I observed that he had a large sty in his left eye. When I got close his breath indicated that he had been drinking.

We talked about the gloves and the sweaters, and the socks and he took a few things, but then he looked at me and said: “You know it’s all about Matthew 25: 31 and following.” Those were his exact words. I knew that passage and I also knew the church language, using following to indicate the entirety of the passage. We talked for a few moments, and he thanked me. He said, “We should all, he observed take care of each other.” I marveled at the street preacher, and then the blowing horns called me back and I knew it was time to return to the truck. I reached out to shake his hand and he shook his head and extended his arms, indicating he wanted a hug. I dropped my hand and we hugged.

I thought then and now that I was listening, in the most unlikely place, to Jesus.

1. How do we listen to those around us and to Jesus?
2. When we are away from our desks, “Does Jesus happen?”

**Dear God, help me listen to Jesus in the words and the lives of the most unlikely people, and places. Help me hear the words and do what must be done. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Michael Brecke, First Lutheran Church, Mission Hills, KS

## SUNDAY, MARCH 3

Scripture Reading: John 2:13-22

**“Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” - John 2:16**

Upon entering the temple Jesus upsets what had become normal behavior. In this act, Jesus challenged the leadership to “clean house” and go back to using the temple as a place of prophetic words being spoken to guide and shepherd the people. He challenged them to return it to a “prophet center” and not a “profit center.” And, in doing so, we get that first glimpse of the ultimate sacrificial lamb, Jesus himself. Soon, very soon, there will be no need for cattle, sheep or doves for sacrifices, because Jesus will offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus challenged the people to see that their legalistic ways of relating to God were finished. He wanted them to know that there was a new and a better way to connect with and experience God. Jesus wanted them, and us, to know God isn’t just available in the temple, or in this church building. God is available to us at any moment and in any place because as Jesus will tell us later in this same gospel, God has sent his Spirit to be with us and in us (John 14:25-26). God does not want us to restrict our worship to one specific physical site, because God is available to us always and everywhere in spirit, and in truth, as Jesus will tell the Samaritan woman soon in this same gospel (John 4:21-24).

As we begin the month of March, we are reminded that Spring is close and for many of us that means it will be time to do some “spring cleaning.” Today, we are being reminded in the words of Jesus to cleanse ourselves, so that we can fully focus on God and God’s ways. As we journey to the cross, we are challenged today to consider those things that we do, even those things that we do with good intentions, that keep us from truly worshipping God and allowing others to worship God and cleanse them from our lives. Amen.

1. What are those things in your life that keep you from fully worshipping God?
2. What are some things that you or the Church insist upon that are legalistic and keep you from worshipping fully wherever you are?
3. How might you worship God at work, at school, or any daily activity?

**Holy LORD, you have provided us your Living Word, in your Son Jesus Christ. Strengthen us to follow his ways, and not ours, that we might come to fully know the joy of being your child. Amen.**

Bishop’s Associate Dave Whetter, Central States Synod

## MONDAY, MARCH 4

Scripture Reading: Psalm 84

**“As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.” - Psalm 84:6**

There are many places in scripture that speak of watering seeds with tears. This isn't an ecological statement but a spiritual one. God uses even our most vulnerable moments to produce something unexpected and maybe even beautiful. It's hard to remember that in the midst of what I like to call “the ugly cry.” You may have experienced an ugly cry at least once in your life: uncontrolled sobbing, nose leaking, mascara running, heaves of muscles, and when you're all finished, the grand prize of exhaustion. In my own experience, an ugly cry is never for a logical reason (like a death or terrible betrayal). I've only ugly cried when it makes no sense; like when a belt loop gets stuck on a door handle. But it's never that thing, right? The silly belt loop was finally the thing to push me over the edge.

The valley of Baca seems like just another place in the Bible. In case you're wondering, it's a valley in Palestine. Our English translation does us no favors in this psalm. In Hebrew, the word, “Baca” (בָּכָה) means “weeping.” So the psalm could read “as they go through the valley of weeping.” Some scholars believe it refers to weeping trees--balsam, mulberry, or aspen trees--that “cry” resin or gum-like tears. Nonetheless, the valley here is a place of great mourning--the place of ugly cries.

You may know how hopeless, fruitless, and dim this place can be. Valleys may offer brief places of respite before the next big climb, but often, valleys can feel pretty vast and lonely. When I have been in “valley moments” of my life, tears are my only form of prayer. In the moments when I am too sad, too angry, too frustrated, or just too tired, tears are the only thing I have. And yet, I know that not only does God see them, God counts my tears and blesses this form of baptismal remembrance.

God does some of God's best work in valleys. Valleys of weeping become places of refreshing springs and pools. This doesn't mean God is a magical wish genie that will take all our troubles away at the first tear fall. Rather, we are promised in scripture, in baptism, in communion, that we are not alone. We gather in a church community to live out this promise in action and in words. We show our fellow pew-sitters and the outside world that we are not alone. We are made to be in community; gathered in Christ, for Christ, because of Christ.

1. Think about your last “valley moment.” How was God there?
2. How does it feel when you cry tears of joy, and where is God in them?

**Dear God, turn my tears into streams of living water. Accompany me through valleys of trials, troubles, and darkness. Remind me that I am beloved by you and that you never leave me alone or abandoned. Amen.**

Interim Pastor Jealaine Marple, First Lutheran, Mission Hills, KS

## TUESDAY, MARCH 5

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21-31

**“For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” - Romans 3:22-23**

It's easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to other people. Whether it's how our house looks, what clothes we wear, how we're raising our kids, or something else, we all tend to cycle between thinking we have it all figured out (for one brief moment) and despairing that we'll never live up to someone else's standard.

Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, and the online craft and decorating idea board Pinterest, don't do much to help with this endless comparing. Scrolling through pictures of your friend's perfectly decorated homemade birthday cupcakes or a coworker's dream vacation to Hawaii can easily lead us to assume that it's possible to have a picture-perfect life, if only we try hard enough.

However, what we usually don't see are the photos that didn't make the cut--the first three batches of cupcakes that flopped, or the blistering sunburn our vacationing coworker suffered from falling asleep on the beach. Personally, I enjoy seeing--and sharing my own!--"Pinterest fails" (craft projects gone awry) just as much as the successes. But it's also tempting to want to put forth only the best image of ourselves, and hide the messy parts where no one can see them.

It's clear that this is not just a 21st-century problem, since Paul brings a similar message to the Romans: "All have sinned and fall short" (v. 23). In other words, nobody is perfect--in the little things, like cupcakes, or the big things, like following God's laws. We are all just doing our best, which will never be perfect, but will always be good enough for God, who "justifies the one who has faith in Jesus" (v.26). That grace is an amazing gift, and one we can honor and appreciate by sharing our honest experiences with others and admitting that we do fall short sometimes. Who knows... your next "fail" could be an opportunity for showcasing God's amazing grace.

1. Is there a person who you thought was picture perfect... until you learned about a huge struggle hidden behind their exterior? How did that change your opinion of them?
2. What might happen if you were more honest with yourself and others when you make a mistake or fall short? What opportunities can you see for sharing how God's grace has impacted your own life?

**Gracious God, you have mercy on us even though we continually fall short. Help us to see others through your eyes, celebrating in their successes and empathizing with their failures. Amen.**

Alison Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

Scripture Reading: Psalm 84

**“My soul longs, indeed faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.” - Psalm 84:2**

Have you ever been so preoccupied with life that you end up overlooking the surprising and unexpected ways that God shows up as we go about our daily lives? I must admit that sometimes I can become so preoccupied with checking items off my never-ending “to-do” lists that I miss out on experiencing what my friend Julie refers to as “God winks,” the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) signs of God’s abiding presence in our lives, in our congregations, and our world.

The psalmist’s heartfelt joy of being and living in God’s presence is a tonic for many of us who may feel worn down, burned out, or simply stuck in a rut. Life is complicated and sometimes we lose our focus, unknowingly shifting our gaze squarely on the challenges of our present circumstances instead of opening ourselves up to the many and diverse ways that God shows up.

Could the answer to our “dis-ease” be as simple as following the example of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection? Brother Lawrence was a 17th-century Carmelite friar whose conversations and letters, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, speak to the deep-seated longing so many of us have to be in relationship with God. Instead of allowing himself to be distracted by theological challenges or institutional politics, Brother Lawrence cultivated a profound sense of God’s presence in his life even as he went about his mundane responsibilities working in the monastery kitchen, washing dishes, or making sandals. For Brother Lawrence, it all started with the realization that “at any moment, in the midst of any occupation, under any circumstances” we can encounter God’s presence in deep and meaningful ways.

1. How, I wonder, might God show up in your life this week?
2. What might need to change for you to experience God’s presence in the routine of daily life?

**Loving God, who invites all of creation into a relationship with you, help me to see and respond to the many ways that you show up as I go about the work to which you have called me. Help me to experience joy and renewal in your abiding presence. Amen**

Pastor Jon Brudvig, Salem Lutheran, Lenexa, KS

## THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6

**“In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” - Ephesians 1:5-6**

Sometimes we come up short in the earthly father luck of the draw. Some people have been rebuffed when seeking a healthy, loving, nurturing relationship with their dads. Some dads are absent completely. Some are emotionally distant. Some dads are cruel. Some dads put restrictions and blocks up to having a full and complete relationship with them.

Paul assures us that this will not be our eternal destiny, however. Everyone who follows Christ will have a glorious, loving, heavenly, eternal Father. A father who loves us unconditionally and has forgiven us all our sins not through our own merit but through his grace alone. We are enough. Jesus paid the price for us.

Paul affirms believers that Christ has come for us. It is Christ's preordained purpose. He comes for all of us to bring us to our heavenly home. And it will be a glorious home. We are told we will not be guests who will be only visiting and must be on our best behavior. Instead, God meets us where we are and tells us that we will be adopted sons and daughters. Our siblings will be the brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the ages. We are worthy. We are loved. We are cherished.

There is no closer relationship than being children of God. And we do not have to jump through legal hoops or perform miraculous deeds in order for this to occur. We are adopted into the family through Jesus Christ. That's it. What an amazing gift. We will dwell in God's house---our heavenly home---for eternity. This is the message of Easter. This is the meaning of being a Christian. Paul simplifies it into a few profound words. Praise God!

1. Is your relationship with God a father/child one?
2. Do you sometimes marvel that Grace alone has saved you?

**Dear God, help me to remember to approach you as my heavenly father who wants the very best for me. Sometimes I don't understand your time and your ways and get impatient. Help me remember that you are the most loving and accepting parent I could ever hope for. Thank you for adopting me into your family. Amen**

Kristi Clark, Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, KS



## FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-13

**Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” - John 3:3**

Today, Jesus calls our knowledge and understanding of God into question. Like Nicodemus we often proclaim to “know” God and God’s ways, but even though we know these things in our head, we haven’t allowed God’s ways to transform us.

We are those who have studied God’s words. We are those who use the right language. We are those who proclaim with our lips what we know, but we, like Nicodemus, can only come to Jesus in the dark. Oh, we know all the right stuff, but what are we doing with that knowledge? We are being challenged to move from theory to practice, from knowledge to faith, from curiosity to commitment and to do this Jesus says we must be able to see God’s kingdom. “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (3:3). What? How can we do this? How can we be born if we are already alive?

When Jesus said, “no one can see the kingdom without being born from above (or again),” he was stating that to be part of God’s kingdom we need to let God transform us, here and now. Being born again, or from above, is something done to us by God. In other words, unless Nicodemus, or you and I, allows God to change our whole way of being in the world, we will not be able to perceive God at work. If we want to see God in this world, if we want to be part of God’s kingdom now, then it’s time to allow God to change our whole way of. In plain English, if you want to be transformed then let God’s wind (Spirit) blow over you. In a world where we think we can find all the answers if we just have more information, more details, more knowledge, Jesus says to us today, “the answers my friend are blowing in the wind.”

1. As you journey to the cross this Lenten Season, what might you start doing differently to help you perceive God in this world?
2. How are we using what we know about God to bring about change in this world?
3. Take some time today to allow God’s Spirit to blow over you. Can you feel God’s wind?

**Holy LORD, send your Spirit to blow over me.  
Breath your Spirit in to me and strengthen me so that I have the  
courage to go and do what your Sprit is sending me to do. Amen**

Bishop’s Associate Dave Whetter, Central States Synod

## SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-13

### “How can these things be?” - John 3:9

Poor Nicodemus, he just doesn't get it.

Watch him as he approaches Jesus with a mixture of confidence and curiosity. “We know,” he says – not with a swagger but with the certainty befitting a member of the powerful, in-charge Sanhedrin - “We know you're a teacher who has come from God.” He's setting the table for a question, but Jesus upends his table with a statement that seemingly has nothing to do with Nicodemus' comment: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” And we're off to the races with a lop-sided conversation that leaves poor Nicodemus wondering, “How can these things be?”

Oh, bewildered Nicodemus, you have a twin: Me.

How many times have I opened a prayer from a foundation of both education and experience? After all, God wants us to show up in the world with our full selves, with our gathered knowledge and our desire for greater understanding. And so I offer clearly what's on my heart. “I know who you are, Jesus the Savior, and I need your input on (fill in the blank).” But what I receive in the hours and days to follow bears no resemblance to what I'm expecting from the Son of God. Crickets. And so, like Nicodemus, I wonder, “Wait, what?”

I've found that it's on this liminal frontier where the Spirit often works most effectively, where my “I know” slowly sputters out and God's invitation to come closer gradually flickers into full light. I'm no longer in charge of the conversation, which makes me open to actually paying attention to what Jesus is saying, in whatever way he chooses to communicate.

Maybe that's what happened to my brother Nicodemus. After all, the last we see of him he shows up after Jesus' Crucifixion to actively help with the burial process. Maybe the question he was going to ask back at the beginning was replaced by God's more compelling and life-giving invitation to come closer. What if that's God's answer to any of my questions? That, and whatever follows?

1. When are you impatient with God?
2. What would it take for you to wait on God?

**Dear God, help me to slow down and truly listen for you. Amen.**

Roger Gustafson, Bishop Emeritus, Central States Synod, ELCA

## SUNDAY, MARCH 10

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

**“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved...and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...” - Ephesians 2:4-5,8**

God watches as I make choices every moment of every day. Many of my choices are not in the best interest of myself, loved ones and strangers. I don't have to give illustrations; I'm sure you understand this.

The consequences of my choices complicate my daily life, so I'm comforted by the fact that we confess and admit our sins publicly every week at the start of worship. We admit aloud that our choices are not the ones that God wanted us to make. We recognize as people of God that: we are weak; we sin day in and day out; and that we need to be made new with Christ every day.

Through confession, we acknowledge a black and white relationship with sin. Sin is black.

Grace and mercy, though, are dazzling white. These are free gifts. No one on earth must do or prove anything to receive them. God loves me so much, even though I make horrible choices, and He just gives me grace. God doesn't want me to remain dead and in the black of night because of my poor choices. God stands me up again and again to continue to move forward into the morning light.

Borrowing a post from my social media feed, “I am not a Child of God because I am strong and have it all together. I am a Child of God because I am weak and admit I need a Savior.” God isn't looking for perfect people. God wants people in their highs and lows of life to join Him in the light.

1. Why isn't Ephesians 2:4-5 more popular than John 3:16 as a call to Christ?
2. Have you ever known anyone with grace like God?

**Dear Lord, help me to share the knowledge of Your abundant grace and mercy. Help all people to know that there is always light to receive. Amen.**

Katharine Fairchild, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## MONDAY, MARCH 11

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

**“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” - Ephesians 2:8-10**

As a person who works in a church full-time, I often find myself turning back to these verses from Paul. Some days they are a source of strength and other days they are a sobering reminder.

Recently I was asked what are the best and worst parts of being a pastor. I told them my answer is the same for both; being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

One of my absolute favorite things to do as a pastor is lead confession and forgiveness and communion during worship. I get to be the one to tell people that no matter what they have done, their sins are forgiven. Then, on top of that, I also get to be the one to invite them to a table where all are welcome. This forgiveness and invitation don’t come because of who I am as their pastor or worship leader. Instead, it comes because of who our God is. Our God is one who operates out of a place of grace.

But not everything about being the hands and feet of Christ is easy.

Because what happens when people who have hurt you answer the invitation to the table? You serve them the broken body of Christ saying “given for you”, knowing that despite your hurt, God has already forgiven them. This forgiveness doesn't come because of who I am as their pastor or worship leader, it comes because of who our God is. Our God is one who operates out of a place of grace.

1. Who is the person that you would have a hard time giving communion to?
2. Who would have a hard time giving communion to you?

**God of forgiveness and invitation, give us strength and courage to be your hands and feet, Amen.**

Pastor Jordan Stone, Atonement Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## TUESDAY, MARCH 12

Scripture Reading: Numbers 20:1-13

**“These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and by which he showed his holiness.”  
- Numbers 20:13**

One of the things that has always rang true for me was the depiction of the Israelites in the wilderness as a bunch of whiners and complainers.

True, wandering in the wilderness is not a lot of fun.

True also, most of the fault for the wandering is their own. God tries to instill trust and reliance in them, but they are never satisfied with any displays of power or reliability, no matter how great.

True as well that the past is easily viewed with nostalgia, “oh the fleshpots of Egypt!” How much better things were for us “back then” than they are now!

These are all recurring themes I’ve experienced through the years of ministry.

Most of the time wrangling an institution like the church is not a lot of fun. There are competing interests, visions of what should be, people operating out of either deep convictions or with volunteer mindset that allows them to come and go as they please or the whims of choice and option take them. It can be maddening.

The “waters of Meribah” (which means, “to quarrel”) seem to flow freely through our society these days. If we don’t have something to complain about, we find something to complain about, or those seeking power pull the levers of discontent to manipulate us.

How good to hear that even when the “waters of Meribah” flow within us, God continues to provide the waters of life that we need.

1. As I step back and look, am I more inclined to a life of thanksgiving, or one of complaint?
2. Do I need more of the “oil of gladness” in my life to make the “waters of Meribah” flow off me?

**God of water and life, provider God,  
stay my hand from striking, and my lips from complaining,  
that I may be a cool refreshment to all I meet. Amen.**

Pastor Merle Brockhoff, Transitional Pastor, Kansas City, MO

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Scripture Reading: John 8:12

**“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” - John 8:12**

In the thick of the snows, we had a water leak in our basement. The furnace room and multi-purpose room had water. The rest of the evening/overnight was pulling tiles and pulling up water, but the water kept coming. So, we decided to shut off the water.

Soon we needed water and called a friend who turned on our water. He didn't stop there, but looked for the leak source. He turned his phone flashlight on. Immediately, we could see plainly that the leak was coming from the furnace humidifier overflowing the pipe onto the floor and seeping into the room next door. The light illuminated a dark spot on the furnace that I could not see without the light specifically shining on it. This reminded me of Jesus' light.

I love the references of light in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I know that Jesus is the light of the world, the only source of true life. I want Jesus to fully be my light and to illuminate His work in all those areas in my heart that need the light. When I fail, may I lean on Him for strength and my source of great hope. Praying that God will help me submit to His will so that He may work through me in the way he wants.

1. In what ways have you allowed the light of Jesus Christ to shine into your life?
2. How have you let Jesus guide your life?

**Compassionate and loving God, help me to see Your Light clearly and follow you where you lead me. Amen.**

Marty Berggren, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Scripture Reading: Exodus 16:9-21

**The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’” - Exodus 16: 11-12**

Anyone who’s ever cooked a meal for a child can probably relate to Moses here. “I’m huuuungry!” they complain. A nutritious meal appears in front of them, with no effort on the child’s part. And then—can you picture the grossed-out facial expression?—“What IS it???” I’m not sure what the Hebrew word for “ewwww!” is, but I imagine that may have been in some of the earlier drafts of Exodus.

After some dramatic protests, the child sniffs, pokes, looks sideways and eventually tries a bite and discovers it’s not so bad after all. What a surprise...their loving parent is not trying to poison them! Still, the next time a new recipe hits the table, they’re likely to go through the whole process again.

In a world where human brokenness is rampant, we learn, even as children, to “trust, but verify.” Delegate a task to a coworker, but be prepared to cover it if they don’t do it well. Leave your child with a babysitter, but text every hour to make sure they’re ok. Ask your doctor about that rash, but not before you’ve asked Google and your social media followers to help confirm what the doctor said is correct.

God asks us to do a hard thing: just trust. God shows us time and again that when God promises, God is faithful. We don’t need to sniff suspiciously at the gifts God sets before us—the feast God provides is always exactly what we need, even when it seems at first glance more like brussels sprouts than ice cream.

Try to let go of the need to make your own backup plans for God’s plans for you. Hoarding the extra manna leads to rotten results, but gratefully accepting what God sets before you brings fullness and peace.

1. What were you whining about the last time you whined?
2. At what (or whom) have you initially turned up your nose, only to find it not so bad after all?
3. What’s your backup plan if God fails you? Do you really need it?

**Faithful God, help me trust you more fully. Lead me to try the things you set before me, and be open to new experiences. Amen.**

Alison Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51: 1-12

**“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with your free Spirit.” - Psalm 51: 10-12**

I have not memorized many Bible verses and, unlike some of my non-Lutheran friends, I cannot quote a verse that fits a certain life situation. I do “record” Bible stories and verses as visual images or even hymns, liturgical setting music or chants.

I imagine that I first heard and started singing one of the settings of “Create in Me” from the red, 1958 Service Book and Hymnal and then later learned at least three other settings from the green, 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship. I can hear several different arrangements right now. Each setting of “Create in Me” is not difficult to learn to sing nor to memorize.

“Create in Me” is no longer a regular part of Hosanna!’s liturgical framework. (This is merely an observation, not a complaint. As a member of the Worship & Music Committee, I could make a suggestion.) Even though I am not singing “Create in Me” as frequently as in the past, I can consider David’s prayer for forgiveness and cleansing and, according to my study Bible, symmetry. I pay more attention to it and look at it from different viewpoints in my mind because hearing it is not a rote occurrence.

I will work to tune my ear to the piano, organ and vocals that fill our worship space each Sunday and learn another Bible verse. I am sure the music imprints on others too. I pray that 40 years from now, some elementary school youth will consider a hymn they heard and write this reflection anew.

1. Is it bad to renew the liturgy so that we learn new arrangements and new songs?
2. What is a favorite memory while singing parts of the liturgy?

**Lord, help me to feel Your presence in music  
so that I may consider Your grace and love. Amen.**

Katharine Fairchild, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO



## SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:31-38

**“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” - Mark 8:33**

I feel bad for Peter. Nobody likes to be called “Satan,” but with it being Jesus, that’s rough. We all know Jesus loved Peter and that he became the solid first leader of the church. But still!

I seriously doubt Jesus intended to put down Peter, but rather to name what was happening. He says it in his very next sentence: “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” That’s easy for Jesus to say. He understands a lot more than we do. He can “live on the very word of God.” But we can’t. We have very real, human, earthly concerns, like wanting our loved ones not to die.

In fact, this is all in response to Jesus mentioning that he was going to die, and soon. Peter might have wanted Jesus to stick around more for his own benefit than for Jesus’ benefit, but it’s still a pretty reasonable want. Jesus provided Peter with life-changing, fulfilling work that he could accomplish. He gave Peter inspiration and hope. But that’s not nearly all of it.

As annoying as it is, God plays the long game. But, like Peter, I’m impatient. It’s hard to think about eternal salvation and the good of humanity when hungry or hurting today.

Sometimes it makes us feel like we’re being rejected in the moment--as if God doesn’t care. It’s annoying, but deep down, we recognize it’s best. We play the long game, too--we save for retirement, we invest in relationships, we don’t give our kids everything they want in the moment, and quite frankly, we get out of bed. So, while I get annoyed and impatient with God, I am thankful that God is thinking ahead. Though sometimes I end up with a bruised ego, I’m thankful that God is looking out for my future and the future of my loved ones.

1. When do you get most impatient with God?
2. What’s God’s long game?

**Dear God, help me be more patient and understanding.  
When I fail at that, help me at least recognize that you  
are good and working for my benefit. Amen.**

Pastor Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO

## SUNDAY, MARCH 17

Scripture Reading: John 12:20-33

**“...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” - John 12:24**

Palm Sunday, 1984. I was sitting on a beach in San Diego, pondering what God might say about me going to seminary. I'd been praying earnestly throughout Lent, and had boldly requested that God should give me a clear answer by Easter. Yet it was not a flash of lightning nor a fall from a horse that brought the clarity; but a gentle, loving Voice that encouraged me to, Just Do It. In other words, “stop with the objections and defenses, and surrender. Trust me.” It was almost as if I had looked out over the ocean and seen words written across the sky, Surrender, Dorothy! But I knew this wasn't Kansas, and that the message was for me.

Jesus' words today carry a similar message. It begins with the word, unless. Unless a grain of wheat falls into soil and DIES, it remains alone, solitary. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Sort of like the seed flung onto good soil that produces 30, 60, 100 fold!

Years ago, a man from the church argued that a seed does not actually die to produce fruit. He was a farmer, so I didn't argue too much. In the end, we agreed that the single seed gives up its essence to duplicate itself. It indeed surrenders to the soil and the rain and the sun so that it can be the foundation of perpetual, or, we might say eternal, life.

Remember, God is the Sower of Seed - lovingly, extravagantly, selflessly. Seed scattered and grains of wheat planted into the darkness of earth will lose their old life - yet will not be destroyed - but mysteriously transformed. The Son of God was “planted” into the world, from the swirling cosmos in the beginning - into the created earth that God so loved - to bring forth a new crop. And we see and believe and follow, being planted in faith, trusting that our investment of our lives will bring forth a God-harvest of transformation, and new life for all the nations.

1. What have you surrendered to God throughout your life?
2. How has what you surrendered produced “fruit” around you?
3. How does God use death to bring forth new life?

**Precious Lord, we thank you for surrendering all that you had, so that we might learn how to follow you through death into new life. Give us strength to trust you on the way. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Susan Langhauser, Stilwell, KS

## MONDAY, MARCH 18

Scripture Reading: John 4:5-41

**“Jesus said to the woman, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’” - John 4:13-14**

Recently a bride asked a baker to make her wedding cake. She asked him to inscribe on top the words from I John 4:18. Verse 18 of the 4th chapter of John’s first letter reads: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” Unfortunately, the cake decorator did not know the Bible well – did not know there is a difference between the Gospel of John and the first letter of John. And unfortunately, the bride and groom did not see the cake until they came to cut the cake at the reception. There, for all to read, was 4:18 from John’s Gospel: “You have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.”

These last are words Jesus spoke to a woman at noon one day. He meets her at the ancient village well in the town of Sychar in Samaria. Everyone in town regarded her as a prostitute. How remarkable, then, that Jesus treats this woman with gentleness, kindness, and respect. He calls her “gune” which is the Greek word for respected lady, like calling her “ma’am”. “Gune” is also what Jesus called his own mother when she asked him to turn water into wine at a wedding and when he was hanging on the cross. In essence, Jesus forgives this Samaritan women. He says she can overcome her past. He sees potential where others only see shame.

Imagine the power of forgiveness to transform a life. I don’t know anything more powerful in a human than Christian forgiveness. God wipes the slate clean and offers divine amnesia for the baggage we carry. That word forgive comes from the words “give” and “forth” and means a generous handing over of something. When Jesus spoke lovingly to this woman, he not only wiped away a troubled past; he handed her a future. He accepts the cup of water she hands him and in return offers her “living water” – joy and eternal life.

1. Who do you need to forgive?
2. Who do you need to ask for forgiveness?

**Lord, refresh my spirit and my life. Help me to come clean about my sins. Forgive me. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran Church,  
Lee’s Summit, MO *Excerpt from an upcoming sermon book from CSS*

## TUESDAY, MARCH 19

Scripture Reading: John 12:20-33

### “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” - John 12:21b

Every spring at a congregation I previously served, I looked out the parsonage windows to see a green or red planter chugging along, the humming of the engine like the song of a prayer. Farmers are some of the most faithful and faith-filled people I know. To plant row after row of crops that will literally turn into thousands of dollars. Or not. I quickly learned tools I needed for ministry in Iowa included a rain gauge and constant knowledge of the farm market report. The mood on Sunday morning often depended on what either of these tools had to share. A lot of hope and goals were tied to one tiny seed. One tiny seed can produce much fruit (or grain). It can also die and produce nothing.

Faith is a gift from God. We nourish it with worship, being in community, studying God’s word, prayer, and on and on. Every time we engage in nourishing this gift of faith, we lose a little bit of ourselves, but in the best way possible. One of my favorite authors (Sarah Bessey) says Jesus turned her into a feminist. In that way, reading the Bible and engaging in worship has turned me into someone who cares about social justice and those on the margins. Any time the focus is not inward, we lose ourselves. We cannot be the body of Christ in a hurting world if our first question is “what does this do for me?”

As we nourish the seeds God planted in us, we start to look at the world through what I like to call our “cross-shaped glasses.” The cross put to death an empire that cared more about power, money, and winning than about caring, loving, and remembering the forgotten. In this reading, we hear some say, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” I admit to requesting this myself more than a few times.

Should we desire to see Jesus, we need not look any further than our neighbor. Jesus is in the forgotten, the marginalized, the hungry, the underemployed, the sick, the unhoused, the mourning, the young, and on and on. If we wish to see Jesus we need look no further than the people we would rather avoid. That’s when we must die to ourselves and realize the people we would rather not nourish relationships with are exactly the people Jesus hangs around. It’s not easy to let your guard down and risk seeing that we may have more in common with those we’d rather distance ourselves from than we care to admit. But there are multiple fields ready to be planted. It’s good for us to remember that new life (relationship with others and a deeper relationship with Jesus) can come out of death--our own metaphorical, of course.

1. Where have you seen Jesus that has genuinely surprised you?
2. What aspects of your life may need to die in order that other may grow?

**“Seed that in earth is dying grows into ears of grain. Grapes that are crushed in the vessel turn into golden wine. God, through this mystery grant us faith in our deepest darkness, life in our night and death.” Amen.**

*“Seed That in Earth is Dying” ELW #330*

Interim Pastor Jealaine Marple, First Lutheran, Mission Hills, KS

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Scripture Reading: John 12:34-5

**“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.’ After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.” - John 12:36**

At this point in John’s gospel, the people did not believe in him. And we are not so different. We say we believe in Jesus, yet we get tight-fisted with our love, judgmental in our attitudes, and stingy with our vision of justice. Our light starts to dim – out of fear, selfishness, and habit.

The words of the hymn, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,” can help expand our vision of what it means to live as children of light. The first verse begins:

*I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus.*

*God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of my life is Jesus.”*

Have you ever taken time to just gaze at the stars with no agenda or time frame, in a place with no artificial light or obstructions? One of my favorite star-gazing places is our Synod church camp, Camp Tomah Shinga, outside of Junction City, Kansas. I have been fortunate to spend time there as a camper in my youth and with countless groups for retreats, service trips, and visits over the years.

The vast and limitless night sky on the prairie offers an unparalleled sense of wonder and awe. Feeling tiny and insignificant in the expanse of the universe, while knowing that we each have a place and purpose and calling as God’s children is empowering.

Experiencing that sense of belonging and infinity broadens our imagination and understanding of this awesome God who calls us to be Children of Light! We need not be limited by only what we know, fearful of what is different, or constrained by selfish desires to hold onto that light as only ours. We can see and experience the constellation of possibilities and illumination that are as great and boundless as the stars in that night sky.

God, the Creator of all that wonder, invites us to live in that light, to share that expansive love, to lavishly shine the hope and promise of Christ in a broken and hurting world.

1. Take time to gaze at the night sky and all the stars. What do you feel
2. How can the expanse of the universe broaden and widen your love and your reflection of Christ’s light?

**God, we want to be children of light. When our brightness fades with fear, selfishness, or other limitations, renew us with grace. Help us shine bright with justice, peace, and love for all you’ve created. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Noni Strand, Overland Park Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Scripture Reading: John 8:10-11

**“Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’” - John 8:10-11**

Have you ever had someone tell you that they are feeling bad because they are struggling with everything going on in their lives? People are hard on themselves for feeling anxious, depressed, scared, annoyed, angry, isolated, etc. Usually, the admittance of these feelings are followed by guilt because things could be much worse for them. I have heard everything from “I still have a job” to “I’m still healthy” to “I shouldn’t complain about having family time.” Maybe you are feeling something similar, I know I have.

I need as many people as possible to hear this message, forgive yourself and give yourself a little bit of grace. It is OK to struggle when you feel like life is pulling you in a million different directions. Please, let yourself feel those things. It’s not bad that you are angry or annoyed that the world around you has been chaotic. It is okay to be sad about a loss or your favorite seasonal flavor of coffee being done. It is understandable that you don’t know how to spend too much quality time with your family.

Forgive yourself, because I can almost guarantee that no one thinks less of you for having emotions. A favorite bible story comes to my mind when thinking of this type of forgiveness; the adulterous woman. This woman is caught in sin and thrown at Jesus’ feet. She has to be feeling all kinds of emotions and expecting death to come to her soon. But instead, Christ speaks and her accusers walk away. They have realized they are not that different from her. When she looks at him he asks her, “did no one condemn you?” And she replied “no one sir.” And then Christ gave her forgiveness saying “go and sin no more.” This woman who is feeling pretty lowly is given forgiveness and then told by her savior that she gets to still have a life.

So no matter what emotion you are feeling, give yourself a little grace, remember you are not all that different from the people around you, and you have a God that has already forgiven you . . . Go and sin no more.

1. Where have been times and places you have tried to hide away what you are feeling?
2. Where can you give yourself some grace today?

**Holy God, help us to navigate the world around us  
and give us grace along the way, Amen.**

Pastor Jordan Stone, Atonement Lutheran, Overland Park, KS

## FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:21-28

**“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” - Matthew 16:24**

No one wants a cross—not for Jesus, not for us. Bonhoeffer said of carrying a cross, “Pain is a holy angel who shows us treasures that would otherwise remain forever hidden; through him men and women have become greater than through all the joys of the world.” But such pain we avoid. Before a cross we cringe. And yet, I think God silently screams at us during Lent, “Remember the cross.” I’m not superstitious but I’m convinced every Good Friday when I was a child the weather was dark and threatening. Thunderstorms howled. “Don’t run from the cross,” God whistled in the wind.

Are you asked to carry a cross? There are unseen crosses everywhere. Whenever we sacrifice for another there is a cross. Whenever we take on a burden we could have ignored because taking it on is the right thing to do there is a cross. Whenever a nurse enters a Covid ward or a soldier takes a bullet to defend the nation, there is a cross. Suffering alone does not make an unseen cross. Anyone can suffer in our fallen world. Taking up a cross is to submit to suffering because you think it is the right thing to do. You accept the suffering because some service is performed, some dignity is respected, some harmony with the Father is found.

There was a time when most Lutheran clergy in the city I served were young, eager and close. We celebrated when someone married, someone had a baby, someone accepted a new call. Early one fall we were laughing because one shy pastor and his wife announced they were pregnant. Then, in early winter came the whispers—something was wrong. The baby wasn’t developing right. The whispers—they should do something while they still could, they should not have to suffer. Finally, as Spring arrived the quiet pastor said the words—we know the baby cannot live, we know the baby must be born. And so it was—a birth, a baptism, a baby held for an hour and then she was gone. No one asked the mother and father their reasons. Everyone offered their response with a word or a touch or a tear.

For months we noticed a look in their eyes, as if they had been given a burden not too heavy for them at all, as if it were light, a privilege, borne on another’s shoulders, being led to a high place the rest of us could not go, following a sign the rest of us did not see.

1. Do you carry a cross? What makes it a cross and not merely suffering?
2. Who has a cross you could help carry?

**Lord, help me recognize my cross and to see beyond it to the sunrise on an empty tomb. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Paul Hegele, Martin Luther Lutheran,  
Lee’s Summit, MO *Excerpt from an upcoming sermon book from CSS*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

**“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.” - Mark 10:52**

A long time ago, I attended a faith healing service at a huge auditorium in Minneapolis. I was doing a research paper on crowds and how people in a crowd can be induced to a sort of mass consciousness.

I had attended a second tier wrestling match and watched as a chant moved through the crowd during a particularly brutal display. The other crowded event was a mass healing service by an unknown, at least unknown to me, healer. Here the circumstances were the same with a chant going through the crowd, gaining force and momentum. An elderly woman in a wheelchair, was invited by the evangelist, to come forward to the front of the auditorium. She was in a long line of people seeking healing and a change in life and circumstance. When the woman was brought forward the healer placed his hands on the woman, said a series of words, and then in a dramatic voice cried out be healed and walk. The crowd, first hesitantly and then with more voices cried out “Walk, Walk, Walk”, with some adding the words “be healed.” The healer asked his assistants to take the woman away, and then said to the crowded auditorium of people seeking healing, “This woman did not have enough faith.”

Lent is a time when we take a look at our faith and try to put together all of the various parts that make us faithful and give to that faith renewed understanding. I have always felt that this particular healing is made so that we might juxtapose the word faith and sight.

Faith does not mean that we necessarily get something we want, but it does mean that we have a deeper understanding of what faith is, because now we see it for what it is: a relationship between humankind and God. And the faith is in the relationship, not in getting what we want from God.

1. When we don't get what we want from God, does that weaken our faith?
2. When we do have a blessing, does it mean that our faith made it happen?

**Dear God, our faith makes us whole. Help us remember that faith is not about getting what we want, but rather it is about what God is doing in the world and in our lives. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Michael Brecke, First Lutheran Church, Mission Hills, KS



## PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Scripture reading: Mark 11:1-11

### “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” - Mark 11:9

What a scene: Jesus astride a colt, riding into Jerusalem to the celebratory shouts of “those who went ahead and those who followed.” Jesus, surrounded by acclaim and praise: *“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”* If I were Jesus, that would be music to my ears.

Interesting that Scripture doesn't record a reaction by Jesus. No hand-cupping (Giants QB Tommy DeVito, take note), no acknowledgement at all. I would have come up with a smile, at least, some indicator of my swelling ego.

Fast forward less than a week. Another crowd – or maybe the same one – with a very different urging about this Jesus. *“Crucify him!”* It's a bloodthirsty mob now. *“Crucify him!”* they shout. Interesting that, again, there's no reaction by Jesus. He makes no defense, offers no explanation; he says nothing. Me? I would have been terrified.

Note to self: Take a tip from Jesus and refuse to live life on its own terms. Because if you live life on its own terms you'll feel like a million bucks when the adoring crowd can't get enough of you and like garbage when it treats you like garbage. But like a lot of good advice, when it comes to me I find it's easier said than done.

Back to Jesus. He must have heard the fickle crowd on both occasions, but maybe he was listening more intently to a different voice, the one he heard much earlier, as the baptismal water of the Jordan glistened on his upraised head: *“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”* He hears from God that he belongs, he is loved, he is pleasing. It comes to him as his orienting and sustaining gift, no expiration date. He'll need it, as will you and I.

Another note to self, and to you: Lean forward and listen for the bedrock truth of your life, the one that's truer than any other claim on you: *“You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

1. How heavily impacted are you by the opinions of others about you?
2. How often do you take time to listen for God?

**Dear God, remind me again of your claim on me. Amen.**

Roger Gustafson, Bishop Emeritus, Central States Synod

## MONDAY, MARCH 25

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 48:1-7

**“I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” - Isaiah 49:6**

The prophet Isaiah explains that the servant is not chosen by God only for the sake of restoring God’s chosen people, Israel. No, the servant’s role is more expansive. While the servant may be comfortable helping their own people, they must also know that God sends the servant “as a light everywhere, and well beyond their comfort zone.

We are most comfortable with people who are most like us. Homogeneity (which means everything is alike) reigns in many neighborhoods, in many of our congregations and even in our workplaces. It can be scary to encounter someone or something new and different. And if we are being honest, even those who look like us are truly different because of their experiences, gifts, or cultural phenomena that shape them (to name just a few things).

As a child of God, baptized into a life of servanthood we are God’s gift as a light to the world. We are not just receivers of God’s love, we are the gift of light and the givers of God’s love, too. Not just inside of our own congregations or neighborhoods. And we are not to place limits on who, what or where we share the good news of God’s salvation. That means we might have to shine our lights in uncomfortable spaces.

1. Where are you most comfortable shining your light?
2. Who or what challenges you as one called to share God’s love in the world?

**O Giver of salvation for all, thank you for choosing us to shine the light of your love into the world. Help us to overcome our own discomfort when shining your generous light into the world.**

**AMEN.**

Rev. Sue Tarkka, Overland Park Lutheran Church, Overland Park, KS

## TUESDAY, MARCH 26

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-30

**“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” - 1 Cor. 1:18**

As we collectively pivot from the joyous “Hosannas” of Palm Sunday to the betrayal and death awaiting Jesus, some of us have “hit the wall.” Our enthusiasm to follow through with our Lenten commitments may be waning. We are distracted, weighed down by other pressing demands on our time, and find ourselves struggling not to lose sight of the cross during our journey with Jesus to Golgotha.

As the text from 1 Corinthians reminds us, the cross in first-century Roman-occupied Palestine was proclaimed to be utter folly, an instrument of torture administered by the state to execute, silence, and humiliate. It was a cross of shame, brutality, punishment, and failure. No one in their right mind would want to end up on one. Yet, placed within the larger context of Jesus’ ministry, the cross is also a challenge. Jesus repeatedly instructs disciples of every time and place to “pick up your cross and follow me.”

May our pilgrimage to the cross challenge each one of us to ponder how Jesus is inviting us—as individuals and collectively as God’s people – to follow the crucified Christ into the broken spaces and places of our world. Because when we take up our cross and follow Jesus into the world, we go where Jesus goes. We extend love, mercy, and acceptance to the people whom Jesus embraces and invites into relationship--tax collectors, sinners, lepers, the unclean, and people yearning for restoration and relationship.

Taking up our cross and following Jesus is costly because it forces us to confront unpleasant truths -- truths that we would rather avoid or ignore. We know that some of our siblings in Christ are hanging on the cross of violence consuming their homelands and indiscriminately killing non-combatants. Others are hanging on the cross of paralyzing addictions, dehumanizing poverty, or lack of access to life’s necessities. Countless others are huddled under a cross of fear – fear of not being welcomed, fear of being denied access to freedom from want, and fear of being enslaved in demonic systems that exploit, abuse, and enslave God’s beloved children.

1. What, I wonder, might that look like if I followed Jesus into the world?
2. What might I need to let go of? What might this look like for me?

**Compassionate God, help me to follow you into the world. Help me to live into the promise of my baptism, trusting the Holy Spirit’s work in moving me beyond the comfort and security of my privilege as I respond in loving service to neighbors near and far. Amen**

Pastor Jon Brudvig, Salem Lutheran, Lenexa, KS

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:1-3

**“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

**- Hebrews 12:1-3**

“We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” is a clear testimonial to the communal nature of the Body of Christ, known as the Church. Throughout generations, this is especially true as we gather for worship to commemorate and celebrate the upcoming events of Holy Week. It is within the context of the Christian community that we participate in the Lord’s Supper on Maundy Thursday; we witness the horror of our Lord’s crucifixion on Good Friday; we watch and wait for our Lord’s resurrection on the Vigil of Easter and we erupt into the joyous proclamation of the Good News on Easter!

We do not do these things as isolated individuals. We do them together with others—as the great “cloud of witnesses”—for we are the Church! In spite of our differences, we are those who have been called, claimed and commissioned by the one who willingly laid down his life for the sake of our sins. We are those who have been redeemed, saved and sanctified through the blood of Jesus. This is not our own doing, but something wonderfully miraculous that God has done for us as children of God.

1. Who are the “cloud of witnesses” in your life?
2. How will you celebrate the outpouring of God’s grace with other members of the Body of Christ this week?
3. In what ways do you feel “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” as you live out your faith?

**Loving Lord, thank you for the call to be connected to the great “cloud of witnesses.” May we bring honor to your name as we work together for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Bob Dealey, First Lutheran Church, Topeka, KS

## THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

**“...if I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” - John 13:14-15**

Today is Day One of the Triduum, and I’m not feeling it. My arms are folded, and not in prayer. I’m too busy, too many tasks. Even retirement carries stress, and I need a little TLC. Perhaps I just need to take a deep breath, kick off my shoes and relax. Maybe your Lent was not exactly as reflective as you’d hoped it could be as well.

The Lenten season is filled Light and Darkness, Repentance and Forgiveness, Serving others and Nourishing ourselves. Worship is filled with symbols: Ashes to remind us that we won’t be here forever. Incense that stung our noses. Palms strewn, waved, and burned. Bread and wine. Colors, music and prayer.

Now we imagine ourselves at table with Jesus. We’re weary, bone tired, yearning for quiet time with those who’ve shared the journey. We need Jesus, and his undivided attention. And Jesus wanted his disciples to **feel** how he loved them. As he looked across the table, perhaps he thought about the years of walking, miles of dirt roads and sick people, hours of shuffling across hot sand, nights of sleeping outside by a fire. They had been with him, aiding him. They were part of it. They were part of him.

Why did he wash their feet? Jesus may have answered, *“I did it to soothe them, to refresh them, to prepare them. I did it because I wanted to be near them for the last time. I did it, because I loved them.”* He did it, because he loves us.

Today we slip off our shoes and feel the floor of God’s house, holy ground. Even if you have never considered letting someone pour water over your feet and dry them with a towel, imagine how good that will feel, and how Jesus taught us how to love in so many different ways.

Even if your arms seem crossed to everything else, let Jesus himself love you tonight, through someone else’s hands. We’re all learning how to love as Christ loved us.

1. Imagine this most intimate moment with Jesus kneeling at your feet to wash them. What emotions does this image bring up in you?
2. What would you need to feel that closeness to Jesus’ presence in your prayers, or your reading of Scripture, or your meditation on the cross?

**Jesus, you have loved me better than I love myself.  
Strengthen me to love as you love. Give my heart the desire to reach  
beyond myself. Bind me to you in service to others. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Susan Langhauser, Stilwell, Kansas

## GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Scripture Reading: John 18:1 - 19:42

**“And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” - John 19:42**

A man had two sons...thus begins so many of Jesus' parables. Today we might ponder three of the sons of Israel, who had some divergent responses to the challenges that Jesus of Nazareth was posing in life and now, in his death.

The first son, Judas, is not unlike the younger son in the Prodigal story. Wanting his payoff early, Judas was a disciple, and apparently believed Jesus was who he said he was, However, the bits that we know only from scripture leave out the legends and suppositions and he has been labelled by history as the vessel of Evil. He never got the chance to return home in this life.

The elder son(s) have labored in the father's house all their lives: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. These two Pharisees always do the right thing... but undercover, not going public with their struggles. They have received their reward, but perhaps don't recognize it.

Guess you really can't tell a book by its cover. Where Judas was sure of what he was sure of, he failed in his faith by his betrayal of trust. And while the pharisees could not bring themselves to proclaim Jesus publicly, they were there at his end, to make sure all was done according to the Law.

Regardless of the challenges confronting these men, we all react to evil in our own ways. Hear the words of a youngster in a First Communion preparation class years ago. When asked, "*Have you ever done anything that you knew was wrong and didn't think your parents knew about it? How did that make you feel?*" Some said, not good, bad, yucky, etc. But one little guy said, I felt as if evil had penetrated my heart and was flowing through my body.

Judas, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea – all responded to Jesus, whose hands still wet from washing Judas' feet raised in blessings over bread and wine; as he was about to allow himself to be sacrificed to save us all – including Judas – from the effects of “evil penetrating our hearts and flowing throughout our bodies...”

1. How do you make sense of the actions of these three men during Holy Week?
2. What do you think you would believe, especially if you had been a Law-abiding Jew during Jesus' life and ministry among us?

**Father God, when the hope of Israel had been crucified, the multitudes in were faced with a choice: in light of Jesus, how then are we to live? Thank you for allowing us to have the knowledge that came a few days later. For your Son, for the Light that lightens the Gentiles, and for your love for us, we give you our devotion, gratitude and lives. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Susan Langhauser, Stilwell, Kansas

## SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:1-8

**“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you. So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” - Mark 16:7-8**

The Three Days (Triduum) come to their conclusion today. We've been through the knothole of Jesus' Passion and death during this week, and we have participated in the rituals of Maundy Thursday: the Last Supper, loving washing of feet, new commandment to love one another and the solemn stripping of the altar. On Good Friday we sat in silence in the dark, and *beheld the life-giving cross, on whom was hung the Savior of the whole world* (ELW page 264.) And today, Holy Saturday, we find ourselves suspended – waiting as we did during Advent – with anticipation of a celebration we are privileged to know before it happens.

Some of us will mark the first Eucharist of Easter during the Great Vigil tonight. We will hear again the salvation history in readings from Scripture, light a new fire and baptize (or affirm our baptisms). Then we will keep silent vigil, as if we were awaiting dawn to give us enough light to make our way to the tomb of Jesus to pay our last respects. These three days are hard, but these three days changed our lives forever.

So don't be sad, beloved ones. Because the three days gave us three little words that echoed from the cross and down the ages. Three little words – that's all they were. For these were the last words that Jesus spoke from the cross: *It is finished!* But I hear the translation that appears in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, where the dying Jesus' last words were not words of defeat and surrender, but words that echoed the triumph to come. For there, the three little words are rendered, ***It is accomplished!*** His work was done.

But ours is not. The gospel for tonight's Vigil tells us that fear gets in the way from the tomb forward. While Jesus has accomplished his work, the woman at the empty tomb *said nothing to anyone for they were afraid*. So how in the world do we know what happened on Easter morning? Well, somebody said something...now go and do likewise.

1. The storyteller Scheherazade says in 1001 Arabian Nights, “The one who has a story and doesn't share it is either greedy or a fool.” How do you explain Mark's ending, and the “silence” of the women at the tomb?
2. How do you tell the story of Easter?
3. What is the best illustration of God's love in your unique life journey?

**Blessed are you O Lord our God, Creator of the Universe. Thank you for what you have done to show us just how much you care. Give us the faith and desire to tell the world how you have changed our lives, and help make us worthy of the gospel of Jesus, the Risen Christ. Amen.**

Retired Pastor Susan Langhauser, Stilwell, Kansas

## EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Scripture Reading: John 20:1-18

**“Supposing him to be the gardener, Mary said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’” - John 20:15-16**

I still find it hard to believe that Mary didn't recognize Jesus. He was such an important part of her life! Maybe her eyes were cast to the ground, or they were filled with too many tears. Whatever the reason (I'm sure it was a good one), she couldn't recognize him. But it only took one word to change all of that: "Mary." Her name.

How powerful that must have been. Not only does it give clarity that Jesus is alive, it reminds Mary who she is--a person with hope. She is Mary--beloved, capable, and a caring friend.

There are days when I yearn to hear my name on the lips of God, days my eyes are cast down and filled with tears. On those days, I am like Mary--my heart hurts and I feel like God has abandoned me.

I have yet to hear my name on the divine tongue, but I have heard it on the lips of people who love me. I've heard people say my name and ask me what's got me down. I've heard encouraging words and invitations to step out of my sorrow. I've heard it whispered in the soft touch of hugs. I've heard it carried on the smiles and playfulness of the kids I meet at church. It's not quite the same as Jesus' voice, but it's pretty close. And it changes me. It's brought me back to life many times.

When my eyes are down and filled with pain, it's hard to remember that is God alive, present, and speaking through the people around me. But that doesn't **stop** God from speaking to me and reminding me who I am--one who is beloved, surrounded by love, and full of life.

This Easter, may you hear your name. May you know that you are beloved. May you know that you are not lost. May you know that you are still alive, and, by the grace of God, always will be.

1. When has someone saying your name kept you from harm?  
When has it woken you up from depression or despair?
2. How would you respond to your name being spoken by Jesus?  
What would it lead you to?

**Redeeming God, sometimes I forget who I am. In those times, speak my name again, that I may remember that I'm not alone, that I matter, and that there is still abundant life for me. Amen.**

Pastor Mike Kern, Hosanna! Lutheran, Liberty, MO